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**News Release**



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**UAMS Welcomes 15 Students to New**

**Post-Baccalaureate Pre-Med, Public Health Program**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) has welcomed 15 students comprising the inaugural class of a post-baccalaureate pre-med program called Medical Scholars in Public Health.

The program is a collaboration between the UAMS colleges of Medicine, Public Health and Pharmacy.

The 15 students who began classes May 24 were chosen from about 45 applicants. The students are: Austin Anderson, Michael Bunyard, Florenz Cruz-Artiga, Samuel Edogun, Madison Hershberger, Savannah Hickman, Tierra Holland, Xavius Hymes, Kayla Jimmerson, Maria Meneses-Ramos, Nidal Shah, Xochitl Shields, Stefany Sierra, Alexandria Smith and Savannah Stacks. They come from Little Rock, El Dorado, Conway, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith, Rogers, Mountain Home, Damascus and DeQueen, with one originally from El Salvador and another originally from Guatemala.

“We’re cultivating home-grown talent with the aim of increasing the medical talent that remains here and gives back to the state,” said Jerrilyn Jones, M.D., an associate professor in the College of Medicine’s Department of Emergency Medicine and the director of the new program, during a June 9 reception in the Daniel W. Rahn Interprofessional Education Building.

The program is intended to serve as an educational bridge to a master’s degree in public health and/or a medical degree for Arkansas residents who come from socially, economically or geographically disadvantaged backgrounds and who have faced challenges in the medical school admissions process.

All of the students will work toward a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. After the first year, those who have a Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) score of at least 505 and a grade point average of at least 3.5 will receive fast-track admission to medical school. The others can also apply to medical school, with all who are accepted agreeing to complete the master’s degree while attending medical school.

Those who didn’t get accepted into medical school will continue working toward a MPH for a second year, with the option to reapply to the College of Medicine. The master’s degree doesn’t require a thesis but does require the completion of 42 credit hours and a capstone research project consisting of an applied practice and integrated learning experience project.

Sara Tariq, M.D., associate dean for student affairs in the College of Medicine and chair of the program’s planning committee, said committee members reviewed not only the students’ academic credentials but qualities like “grit, compassion and an ability to pivot” that will help them to become first-rate doctors.

Five of this year’s students went through the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) MedTrack program last year.

The MedTrack program is a partnership between UAMS, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) and Philander Smith College in Little Rock, which are historically Black institutions. The partnership is aimed at helping more minority students enter the medical field. It provides a combination of mentoring, tutoring and assistance navigating the application process for medical school and other health care opportunities.

Both the MedTrack and new Medical Scholars in Public Health programs are supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling $7 million with 10% financed with non-governmental sources. UAMS Regional Programs oversees these initiatives.

Both programs are part of UAMS’ multi-faceted approach to increase the number of underrepresented minorities, rural and disadvantaged students entering the state’s health care workforce.

Christopher Westfall, M.D., now-transitional dean of the College of Medicine, tasked Tariq two years ago with starting up the post-baccalaureate program. During the reception, he emphasized the collaborative effort that brought the idea to fruition, naming Jones; Tariq; College of Public Health Dean Mark Williams, Ph.D.; College of Pharmacy Dean Cindy Stowe, Pharm.D.; Robert McGehee, Ph.D., the dean of the Graduate School; and Brian Gittens, vice chancellor for the UAMS Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, as well as members of the Post-Baccalaureate Committee.

“Our goal is to make the state of Arkansas a healthier place while tackling health equity and health disparities,” said Susan Smyth, M.D., Ph.D., who on June 1 replaced Westfall as dean of the College of Medicine and executive vice chancellor of UAMS.

“This program targets a very important issue in our health care system – how to increase diversity in our physician workforce,” said Kevin Ryan, J.D., associate dean for student and alumni affairs in the College of Public Health. “Research is clear that health outcomes are improved when individuals and families are cared for by providers with diverse characteristics and backgrounds. Importantly, the training in population science that these students will receive will, we believe, result in them becoming very well-rounded physicians, no matter what specialty they ultimately pursue.”

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state’s Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery.UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com/). Find us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/UAMShealth), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/uamshealth), [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/UAMSHealth) or [Instagram](https://instagram.com/uamshealth/).

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